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Conclusion: Asian and African Systems of Polyandry

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The papers collected in this volume survey a number of aspects of the various systems of polyandrous marriage found in South Asia and Northern Nigeria. In our introduction we stated that we would reserve a summary evaluation of the relevant ethnographic data and theoretical concerns for this, the final and concluding chapter. The primary purpose of this chapter is not, it should be noted, simply to outline, review or trace the interrelationships between themes presented in these collected papers. Rather it is our intent to discuss their relevance to more general issues in the comparative study of polyandrous marital systems. We will have the opportunity to examine a number of salient issues here; some have long been considered problematic or paradoxical aspects of polyandrous marriage, while others, though perhaps overlooked previously, seem to have underlain the perception of certain aspects of polyandry as problematic.

The topics which are emphasized in this chapter provide a fairly comprehensive coverage of the primary questions considered in the collected papers. The subjects of inquiry in these papers, and accordingly the questions asked and answers sought are remarkably diverse, a fact which is not accidental. We had originally planned to include contributions offering a wide range of information about as many polyandrous societies as possible, and we had also hoped to find papers on lesser-known or more recently studied societies. The reasons for this are manifold: to supplement the available literature on the subject, to make possible the development of a satisfactory framework for cross-cultural comparison and to encourage more representative generalizations about the structure and functioning of polyandrous marital systems. In addition we wished to provide patent evidence of the very basic differences in polyandrous systems worldwide, to illustrate the primacy of such contrasts as are found in the intricate marital exchanges of the Rukuba, the extra-marital alliances of the Birom, the close-knit fraternal unions of Nyinba men and the apparently anarchic marital customs of the Nayar. Recognizing the soundness of Berreman's assessment of polyandry as a phenomenon which does not admit of a single unitary explanation everywhere

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(1962), we also sought contributions which accounted for polyandry on different levels or in different terms and which utilized dissimilar theoretical perspectives as well.

These papers have more than met our expectations, providing a wealth of new data and suggesting a number of new approaches to the study of polyandrous marriage. In accordance with our aims in this conclusion—to provide an overview of key issues, to consider the contributions of the papers collected in this volume and to suggest productive directions for future studies—we have organized this paper into three major sections. We begin the first section by examining the definitional problem of polyandry, a problem which has plagued anthropologists for more than two decades. This is important here, not only because it is necessary to specify what we and our contributors mean by the term, but also because this problem lies at the heart of certain difficulties encountered in describing and understanding polyandrous societies in the past. Although we do not expect to resolve the problem to everyone's satisfaction, the assumption of a clearcut position is a mandatory first step for a comparative study of the subject. We then move from the consideration of these issues to the examination of polyandry and its implications for women's status, a subject directly addressed by several contributors. In the first section we finally review two other topics which have attracted considerable attention: the adequacy of economic explanations and the saliency of political concomitants of polyandry.

The second section of this paper is concerned with the analysis of different types of polyandry. The discussion is organized along the lines of a fourfold classification of polyandry plus *cicisbeism*, expressly developed so as to elucidate the major contrasts between diverse polyandrous systems worldwide. The distinctions between these types of plural sexual and marital alliances for women are readily compressed into a more comprehensive contrast between Northern Nigerian and South Asian systems of polyandry (which can be related to the overriding differences between Asian and African systems of marriage).

In the final section we draw attention to those features of marriage which are characteristic of all polyandrous societies on which satisfactory data are available. The identification of apparently universal features of polyandry may not solve the possibly unresolvable problem of polyandry's origins, i.e. why it has arisen in one society rather than another. However it should lead to a better understanding of its observable structural and cultural manifestations. The discussion in all three sections necessarily derives from material on polyandry presented in this volume and also from accounts of polyandry presented elsewhere.

I. Key Issues in the Study of Polyandry

A. *Polyandry and the Definition of Marriage*

A basic, consistently troublesome and certainly the best publicized issue in the study of polyandry is whether it should be considered polygamy, i.e. an example of plural *marriage*. In a paper still cited, Fischer (1952) denied that

polyandry exists, concluding that all known cases of so-called polyandry were truly polykoity or 'plural mating,' without benefit of marriage for all participants. Fischer based this conclusion on his assumption that in these polyandrous situations the woman truly had only one husband and that one husband was sufficient to legitimate any children produced by the marriage. In fact these conclusions rest on a simple misunderstanding of polyandrous marriage, as will be clarified below. Although such interpretations were more than understandable in view of the rather limited data which were available twenty-five years ago, they are justifiable no longer. Prince Peter's monumental work, *A Study of Polyandry* (1963), and Gough's accounts of the Nayar (see especially 1959 and 1961) offer evidence adequate to dispel all doubts about the existence of polyandry as a form of polygamy. That they have not is well attested by an examination of current introductory anthropology texts and textual surveys of kinship and marriage. These facts alone should demonstrate the need for additional studies of polyandrous societies as well as for an updated reconsideration of related theoretical and definitional concerns.

In response to the very different approaches of Fischer and Prince Peter (1955), Leach evaluated evidence relevant to the question of whether polyandry rightfully can be considered a form of plural marriage (1955, reprinted 1961). This led to related questions about the definition of marriage *per se*, more particularly whether definitions of marriage which hinge solely on the legitimization of children are adequate for comparative purposes, or whether marriage is best defined in terms of variable subclasses of interpersonal rights. The points raised in Leach's article served as impetus to a rebuttal by Gough who affirmed the importance of the legitimization of children for Nayar Marriage (1959).

Both Leach and Gough were concerned with two basic issues which are relevant to the discussions of several papers in this volume, namely: (1) how is marriage best defined and (2) is polyandry really a form of plural marriage. None of the contributors to this volume doubts the second question and most hold a similar position with regard to the first. As with the majority of anthropologists, they agree with Leach's suggestion that the cross-cultural study of marriage should not be oriented toward determining whether any particular definitive marital characteristic is present or absent. Although most anthropologists do assume that the marital relationship may be extremely variable, they also acknowledge an underlying commonality which permits ethnographic observers and the people being studied to distinguish readily between 'marriages' and extra-marital relationships (Prince Peter 1957). We suggest that what is termed 'marriage' may be associated with a potentially infinite set of rights and duties, but that attention to the various cultural conceptions of marriage (cf. Goldschmidt 1966:24-26) reveals that there are a set of rights of overriding importance in most, if not all, societies and thus of universal or near-universal significance.

One apparently universal concomitant of marriage is the legitimization of children born to the wife; thus it is not surprising that so many writers have

considered this a proof and primary function of marriage. The importance of the legitimation of children in distinguishing polyandrous marriage from other potentially procreative plural relationships for women, such as cicisbeism, is evident in the writings of a number anthropologists (e.g. Berreman 1978:18 for the Pahari; Levine, this volume for the Nyinba; Mandlebaum 1938 for the Kota; Prince Peter, this volume:3 for the Greeks of Kalymnos; Smedley, this volume; and Muller, this volume:9 for the Birom). In contrast Prince Peter rejects the use of the criterion of legitimacy as a universal feature of marriage. He bases this conclusion upon his knowledge of Toda society, stating that the *pursutpimi* ceremony legitimates children, irrespective of the facts of marriage (1956, this volume). However Gough has pointed out that among the Toda only husbands have the right of participating in the ceremony (1959:23).

Another key feature of marital unions and one which has been less often remarked on is that of affinity, the final class of rights to which Leach draws attention. Marriage, in every case that we know of—including all of the better-known polyandrous cases—inevitably creates or affirms relations of affinity between the kin of one married partner and his or her spouse, and occasionally between the larger natal groups of husbands and wives as well. This is true even of the Nayar who so frequently provide a limiting case for hypotheses about the nature of marriage (cf. Gough 1959:30, 32; Leach 1961:107-108; Dumont 1961:21-22; Fuller 1976:113).

Thus we can tentatively suggest that the bestowal or affirmation of legitimacy and affinity are key and possibly universal features of marriage. Moreover these two sets of rights are structurally and functionally interconnected. When marriages are childless, affinity generally is of negligible significance and cannot be perpetuated beyond a single generation. Similarly, children who are not accounted legitimate lack socially accepted ties of both kinship and affinity.

Now that we have discussed what we mean by marriage and have shown why polyandry should be considered a form of marriage, that is, plural marriage or polygamy, it remains for us merely to reiterate what we mean by polyandry *per se*, i.e., what are its definitive attributes. The term 'polyandry' can be used in reference to any situation in which a woman is married to two or more men simultaneously. It does not apply to circumstances in which women are permitted or encouraged to engage in extramarital liaisons of the sort which may be termed cicisbeism, a form of polykoity. Polyandry is also clearly differentiated from the levirate. The latter [of two kinds as Prince Peter notes (this volume)] involves marriage to only one man at a time and the provision of children for the husband alone.

B. *Androcentric Bias in the Study of Polyandry*

It should be evident from the discussion in the previous section that in logical terms polyandry offers no more definitional problems than its conjugal obverse, polygyny. Thus as a postscript to this review of the definition of marriage in general and polyandry in specific we would like to call attention to the notable

difficulty that western anthropologists have had in accepting polyandry as such and fitting it into comprehensive theories of marriage. Widespread disbelief in the existence of polyandry has not, however, managed to preclude a prevailing fascination with the subject. Berreman (this volume) has attributed the latter to exotic and androcentric biases and we feel that the apparently paradoxical skepticism about polyandry also can be accounted for by reference to such factors. Another relevant consideration in this regard is the fact that the Western Judeo-Christian, Islamic and South Asian Indic traditions are all antithetical to marriage systems which condone or approve of plural sexual unions for women. In contrast South Indian Dravidian traditions and most of the 'pagan' traditions of sub-Saharan Africa exhibit no intrinsic opposition to polyandry (as noted by Yalman, personal communication). Those societies which strongly oppose polyandry or plural sexual unions for women also, not surprisingly, resist perceiving women's sexual and reproductive capacities as separable, while they show little or no resistance to accepting the separability of men's sexual and procreative attributes. And it may well be a fundamental feature of the ideological system of polyandrous peoples that they recognize such a distinction for *both* men and women. Examples may be found in a variety of ethnographic cases, but the Nyinba provide a ready illustration. Here, brothers jointly share their rights in their wives' sexuality and are not opposed to sharing these rights with others, so long as it does not compromise their rights in her procreative capacities (i.e. as when she is pregnant, past menopause, etc.). However they perceive as separable and are very careful to allot exclusive rights in her childbearing to one husband—and only a husband—at a time.

Another factor inhibiting previous analyses may be the expectation that polyandry should present structural features that are the exact mirror image of polygyny, even though this is completely contrary to what we know about the characteristic organization of human society. Men everywhere hold certain jural rights over their wives and, in general, have greater authority, domestic or otherwise (for a general discussion of the implications of male authority for kinship and marriage, see Fox 1967; also of relevance are Smedley's observations, this volume). As a result one could not expect to find a polyandrously-wed woman in quite the same social position as a man with a multiplicity of wives. The rather unwarranted assumption that polyandry should be the obverse of polygyny may be responsible for the stipulation that polyandry must, by definition, be constituted of a woman's successive marriages to a series of men (Fischer 1952). This is only one of a number of restrictive ideas about polyandry; another is the requirement that polyandry should entail co-residence of husbands, an expectation which lies behind the common reluctance to acknowledge the polyandrous character of certain West African marital practices. We hope that these papers serve not only to provide a more comprehensive picture of polyandry *per se*, but that they also can broaden our perspective on the variety and range of the possibilities for marriage. The rather unique domestic arrangements characteristic of certain polyandrous systems must be incorporated into theories of kinship and social structure—not merely designated loosely structured,

aberrant customs, nor lumped under the rubric of 'group marriage' and dismissed as sexual permissiveness.

C. *Polyandry and the Status of Women*

A not uncommon assumption about polyandry is that, in some way or other, it ought to be associated with a relatively favorable situation for women. This too may stem from the contra-position of polyandry and polygyny and the equally unwarranted notion that polygyny is somehow degrading to women, a view widely held despite substantial ethnographic evidence to the contrary. However, suggestions that polyandry is associated with high status for women do deserve further consideration especially in view of the fact that much ethnographic evidence seems to confirm such a notion. As Yalman (personal communication) has observed, polyandry is or was characteristically present in parts of South Asia where the status of women is well above the norm, e.g. in Ceylon and among the Nayar.¹ Tibetan women have also been noted to have considerable autonomy and to act with a degree of self-possession remarkable in Asia. The women of the Pahari region, whether of polyandrous or monandrous societies, seem to be less restricted than their sisters of the plains.

However these facts should be examined with considerable caution. It may well be that the more favorable situation for women in Tibetan, Pahari, Sinhalese and Nayar society is due to factors totally unrelated to the marital systems of these societies. Or perhaps it can be attributed to some other subtle concomitant of these marital systems, not necessarily to the fact that women may have a plurality of husbands. And even if one could demonstrate the existence of a systematic connection between women's status and the practice of polyandry, the direction of causality and the reason for the interrelationship would be exceedingly difficult to ascertain. All that we can positively state at this stage of the inquiry is in several polyandrous societies women have a strong position in the domestic sphere. This assertion is best illustrated by the case of Ceylon, where the relationship between women's roles and the marital system has been explored systematically. Here very few marriages are polyandrous, and yet the domestic authority which normatively accrues to women suits the circumstances of polyandrous marriages when they do occur—far more readily than it does polygynous marriages. The fact that the woman is the central figure, the pivot of any household, makes her the link, the "guarantor of...equality, between the associated husbands" in polyandrous marriages. In Ceylon it is even acceptable for the woman to initiate the proceedings which culminate in the creation of a polyandrous marriage from a monogamous one (Kemper this volume).

The facts associated with polyandry or extramarital sexual relationships may have other, unexpectedly positive effects on women's lives. Thus, among the Birom, women take advantage of their *njem* relationships to better their own and their families' circumstances. *Njem* also gives women a certain degree of

¹It may not be fortuitous that the 'status' of Nayar women, i.e. their relative authority and autonomy, has declined since the introduction of monogamous marriages (Mencher 1962:241; Fuller 1976:55).

political influence, if unintentional and indirect, and, more directly, places them in the position of mediators between different kin groups (Smedley this volume). It is instructive too to note that Irigwe women have strongly supported their traditional marriage system, again because it affords them more opportunity for improving their domestic situation (Sangree this volume).

Despite the weight of these data, we again must caution that it would be premature to suggest that polyandry is intrinsically consonant with greater autonomy and authority for women in either the domestic or public spheres. There are several reasons for delaying conclusions of this sort. For one thing, all the relevant data are not available. More saliently, our knowledge of the Toda case rules against it (see Rivers 1906; Prince Peter 1963 and this volume). And there are additional facts to consider in any thorough treatment of the subject. First of all, as Prince Peter reminds us, men in polyandrous societies also are manipulating the situation to what they perceive as their own benefit (this volume). And finally, one must note that female infanticide is not uncommonly found together with polyandry in South Asia (cf. Levine 1978:317; Prince Peter 1963:297, 554-5; Rivers 1906:478, 518), a fact which is hardly congruent with a favorable situation for women.²

D. *Economic Concomitants of Polyandry*

Studies of polyandry in South Asia have often attempted to explain the presence of this form of marriage by reference to an underlying economic rationale. Here again we can see evidence of exotic and androcentric biases, for what else, beyond economic necessity could cause men to forego the pleasures of monogamy, let alone the "lustful indulgence of polygyny" (as Kemper terms it, this volume). While we regard attempts to reduce polyandry to a purely economic relationship as overly simplistic (see also Kemper in this volume), discussions of the economic constraints operative in polyandry are common, and in the case of the Sinhalese, Nyinba and Tibetans, so often mentioned by the people themselves, that we feel they deserve our attention here.

Economic explanations of polyandry are of several sorts and exist on various levels. One of the more prominent sorts of explanation seeks to attribute the origin of a society's marital customs to environmental limitations or economic constraints. This approach has been quite common in studies of polyandry in the Himalayas. For example, Parmar suggests that Pahari polyandry originated in response to the scarcity of land and to the shortage of women (1975:40). Saksena claims that it is necessitated by harsh economic conditions and the need for joint labor (1962:6; see also Majumdar 1962:75). Similar explanations are given for the practice of polyandry in Tibet (summarized in Prince Peter are

²Polyandry is also frequently associated with remarkably high sex ratios and this alone has given rise to suspicions of female infanticide, even where unproven. The high proportion of men to women seems to be further correlated with a low rate of population growth among Tibetan peoples (Goldstein 1976; Levine 1978). Limitations of space and, again, problems of data have effectively precluded a discussion of demographic hypotheses of polyandry in this paper.

1963:559-560). However, as Gough points out, harsh environmental conditions are equally common in non-polyandrous societies as well (1965). One illustrative example of this is provided by the Nepalese in Humla who live alongside polyandrous ethnically Tibetan groups, suffer even more disadvantageous economic conditions, yet do not marry polyandrously. Prince Peter too notes that non-polyandrous Moslems in Ladakh live in the same conditions as polyandrous Buddhists (1955). In any event it is profitless to argue that a given set of environmental and economic conditions necessarily give rise to a specific cultural adaptation. There are numerous means for coping with a harsh environment and other ways of resolving the need for a large labor force than the rare custom of polyandry. For example, the joint family, found throughout India, is one of a number of equally satisfactory solutions to the latter sort of problem.

Mention of Leach's hypothesis about polyandry is also relevant in this section. Following upon his discussion of the classes of rights pertaining to marriage, Leach (1955) suggested that polyandry in Ceylon and elsewhere reduces the potential hostility between brothers that would accrue on the basis of the separate property interests held by their wives. That is to say, with only one wife per sibling set, property interests need not diverge. Leach thus correlates polyandry with women holding inherited property in their own right, i.e., with the institution of dowry. This argument is readily invalidated by the fact that for the poorer Sinhalese, dowries are irrelevant (Tambiah 1973:132-133) and for the Nyinba, the Todas and most Tibetans (Carrasco 1959:35-38; Goldstein 1971:68) they would seem to be so paltry as to be of minimal influence in people's marital decisions (see also Berreman 1962:64).

We have now summarized and criticized two commonly presented 'economic' explanations of polyandry. However, there is a third sort of approach which accounts for the incidence and distribution (yet not for the origin) of polyandrous marriages by reference to a varying set of economic and social considerations. In this context polyandry is seen as a marital option open to members of a polyandrous society; whether or not a particular individual marries polyandrously may be understood in terms of the economic and social constraints affecting his or her domestic group. For example, factors of relative wealth and the availability of economic opportunities may influence a Sinhalese household's decision to include an associated husband. Correlatively certain developmental and economic considerations may determine whether and at what time a Nyinba household partitions. Goldstein has suggested that Tibetan households choose polyandry over other alternatives so as to conserve hereditary rights in property (1971, 1976, 1978). In order to account for the diversity and range in the various marital forms found among Pahari peoples Berreman has provided a comprehensive analysis along these lines. Polyandry, polygynandry³ or monogamy—these are the alternatives available to Pahari households, alternatives that may be selected according to their particular social and economic consequences in individual circumstances. The goal in this is to achieve an optimum ratio of land to

³This term was coined by Majumdar (1962:73).

people (Berreman 1978, this volume). Accounts of this sort do not attempt hypotheses about why polyandry exists in one locale rather than another. Rather, they provide concrete descriptions of how individuals operate within the constraints, economic and otherwise of a given polyandrous social system.

The economic consequences of African polyandry appear to be quite different from those in South Asia. Furthermore they seem to be of lesser relevance—only two of the writers on African systems in this volume have shown any interest in describing the economic considerations operative in polyandrous polygynous/cicisbean unions. This relative neglect of economic correlates of polyandry might be attributable to the absence of problems of land shortage or differential wealth, at least until recent colonial times, although the historical data on this subject are ambiguous. In contrast to the situation in South Asia, the adult males in these, indeed in most African groups, are equally desirous of obtaining as many wives as possible. The desirability of wives can be viewed in light of women's contributions to agricultural labor in Africa (Goody 1973). The more resident co-wives a man has, the greater the wealth his compound is likely to gain. However where economic factors are relevant to the incidence of plural unions for women, their analysis has proved illuminating and provided a fuller picture of how the system works, just as such analyses have proved profitable in understanding South Asian polyandry. As we have noted above, Birom women organize their marital and extramarital relationships with reference to the socio-economic advantages to be derived (Smedley this volume). Similarly, as Chalifoux notes, the marital decisions of Abisi—how long they reside with each husband and whom they choose in 'grass' marriages—may be influenced by factors of relative wealth. Moreover, the substantial transfers of labour and/or property which accompany Abisi marriages seem to underlie the commitment of girls' parents to the secondary marriage system (Chalifoux this volume).

E. *Political Concomitants of Polyandry and the Formation of Alliances*

The political significance of polyandry in both the Northern Nigerian and South Asian cases is integrally related to prevailing patterns of marital alliance in the two regions. Discussions of political organisation in the Jos Plateau invariably make reference to the political import of alliances formed in marriage; and accounts of polyandry invariably shade into descriptions of local politics. In South Asia too, marital practices have definite political consequences in polyandrous societies, but this issue has been neglected.⁴ Interestingly enough, the situation here is quite the opposite of that found for studies of the economic concomitants of polyandry, where the literature on South Asia is extensive and that on Northern Nigeria minimal in comparison. In discussing politics and alliance in polyandrous systems, we have chosen to focus on the interrelationship between the two, not only because it is an economical way of summarizing the literature on the subject, but also because it illuminates some of the key features of both these institutions.

⁴One exception is the Nayar case, where the political circumstances of the military regime and its consequences for the marital system have received considerable attention (cf. Gough 1952; Fuller 1976:121 *passim*).

There are notable differences in the patterns of alliance formed through and the political concomitants of polyandrous marital systems in Africa and South Asia. On the Jos Plateau, alliances mediated through marital ties lie at the very heart of the traditional political process and are crucial to tribal solidarity; polyandrous marriages or *cicisbeo* ties extend and thus amplify the effects of these alliances. In contrast, in South Asia there are specifically political institutions which serve to reinforce society-wide social solidarity. Marital practices may be productive of alliances repeated over generations and, correlatively, of intense social ties between affines who form a separable subgroup in the society. Such practices, though providing solidarity within subgroups, may result in social divisions between subgroups and political factionalism as well.

As noted above, the Northern Nigerian polyandrous variant characteristically creates a wide network of ties of affinity throughout the endogamous community or tribe. Women have at least three husbands and thus a comparable number of sets of in-laws. Adult men too have a multiplicity of in-law ties—from their own wives, through their co-resident sons and out-marrying daughters. All affinal ties are regarded as important and seem little attenuated by their numerousness: in Abisi, for example, they are maintained beyond a particular husband's death through the levirate (Chalifoux this volume). One of the consequences of these polyandrous systems is the proliferation of ties of marital alliance throughout the tribe. We have coined a term, 'alliance proliferative', to describe this function.

Quite the opposite occurs in the South Asian context, most prominently in systems based on fraternal polyandry with preferred or permitted sororal polygyny. Here the potential number of an individual's affinal ties is curtailed by the marital system. For example, in a landholding household in Tibet, four brothers would contract a single marriage together (versus the twelve or more separate marriages that four brothers would normally make in a Northern Nigerian polyandrous society). If those Tibetan brothers chose to engage in polygynandry and selected a sister of the first wife, they would again relinquish the possibility of forging additional affinal ties. But such marital strategies—with the consequences of constricting affinal relationships—are in accordance with the overarching principles of South Asian marital systems. Goody has summed this up under the rubric of what he terms closed systems of marriage or closed *connubium* (1973:31-33).

Another facet of closed exchange in Asia is the common practice of cross-cousin marriage, which, recurring over generations, results in a relationship of perpetual affinity between a limited number of intermarrying groups. Among the Sinhalese, Yinba and Todas, cross-cousin marriage serves to constrict further the extent of affinal relationships already limited by fraternal polyandry and sororal polygyny. In the Nyinba case, as with the Sinhalese and many other South Asian communities, marriages are accompanied by strong and solidary relations between affines, in some ways of greater importance than the ties between agnates (thus another illustration of the importance of alliance in South

Asia). In this context we can better appreciate Yalman's explanation of the rarity of Sinhalese polygyny: as being due to "intimate and all embracing" relationships prevailing between in-laws and the consequent difficulty of splitting one's loyalties between two sets of affines (1967:114). Although Tibetans and Pahari peoples do not customarily wed cross-cousins, they do practice fraternal polyandry and sororal polygyny, forms of marriage which also result in limited yet augmented alliances between groups. We have chosen to term these general characteristics of South Asian polyandrous marital patterns as 'alliance intensifying', in contrast to proliferative qualities of Northern Nigerian polyandrous alliance.

We have not made mention yet of the Nayar case in this section of the paper. Again we find that the resolution of the various problems posed by Nayar marital practices serves to refine our understanding of the issues involved. Traditionally Nayar husband-wife relationships were exceedingly tenuous and there seem to have been no relations of affinity between *sambandham* partners. However it has been argued that the relationship between the lineages of *tali*-tiers and the women for whom this service was performed resembles the affinal relationships of many South Indian communities (Dumont 1961:21-22; Fuller 1976:113-114). Here too affinal relationships, though apparently of minimal behavioral significance, were closed and persisted hereditarily between groups of comparable or of an appropriately unequal status.

In any event, South Asian polyandry, whether fraternal, accompanied by sororal polygyny or cross-cousin marriage, characteristically results in repeated, augmented alliances between groups. In fact, all polyandry, both the South Asian and Northern Nigerian variants, can be described as associated with an amplified pattern of alliance, though the way in which alliances may be amplified differs markedly in the two cases. In South Asia polyandry preserves and intensifies existing affinal relationships; in Northern Nigeria it greatly increases the extent and variety of affinal ties.

II. Structural Subtypes of Polyandry

Berreman has noted that polyandry, like polygyny, does not appear to be a sufficiently unitary phenomenon to be explained in the same terms everywhere (1962:72). The various ways and levels at which polyandry may be accounted for is attested to by the diversity of approaches utilized by the papers in this volume, a diversity reflected by the number of topics we have been able to review in the first section of this conclusion. Berreman also suggests that rather than continuing to posit any uniformities of cause and effect regarding that "elusive analytical fiction 'polyandry' ", we begin looking at the significant similarities and differences underlying the social phenomena polyandry₁, polyandry₂,... polyandry_n, as differentiable types of social arrangements (this volume). We have taken note of this suggestion, examined its validity in light of available data and taken it as a starting point for the typology to be presented here.

In sum, it appears that there are four basic types of polyandry, and, in

addition, the phenomenon of *cicisbeism*.⁵ We will discuss each of the four types plus *cicisbeism*, briefly noting some of the major structural and cultural features of each. These summaries will be illustrated by reference to the groups described in this volume and other well known groups where polyandry is commonplace, or, at least normative, i.e. in accordance with the prevailing cultural norms.

A. *Fraternal Polyandry*

Fraternal or adelphic polyandry is a form of marriage in which two or more brothers marry a single woman. It was found among Tibetans and the Irava (Tiyyar) of Kerala until recent years, is still found among the Pahari peoples of the western Himalayan hills in India, among peoples of Tibetan ethnic affiliation in India, Nepal and Sikkim and is also customary among the Todas. Despite the vast cultural differences between these groups, their marital systems do exhibit key structural similarities and thus may be discussed as a unit.

Our decision to place fraternal polyandry first in our classificatory scheme is not wholly fortuitous. It is seen as the 'classic' form of polyandry, and is the subject of an extensive literature which we will now briefly review.

In any discussion of the subject of polyandry, particularly its fraternal or adelphic variant, it is necessary to begin a review of the literature with mention of Prince Peter's comprehensive study of the subject (1963). He not only provides us with the fullest published account of polyandry in Tibet, and the culturally Tibetan regions of Lahul and Ladakh and updates Rivers' information on the Todas (1906), but also includes a brief description of Irava marriage (following Aiyappan 1944) and discusses the practices of other polyandrous peoples in Kerala. Pahari polyandry has merited a number of ethnographic descriptions; a few of the more recent ones include Majumdar (1962), Saksena (1962), and Parmar (1975). In addition to these resources, there are also several recent theoretically oriented analyses of both Pahari and Tibetan systems of polyandry, i.e. Ballard (n.d.), Berreman (1962, 1975) and Goldstein (1971, 1976, 1978).

In all reported systems of fraternal polyandry, co-resident brothers jointly wed a single woman. Although only one wedding is held, it encompasses all the brothers and establishes public recognition for their marriage. Husbands and wives co-reside, typically patri- or virilocally and form a single household. The solidarity of the men has often been remarked on—the notion of a corporation of brothers is common to a number of studies—and western observers have noted, with some surprise, the seeming absence of sexual jealousy among the men.

A question of considerable theoretical import has been raised about this type of marriage, i.e. whether the eldest brother alone 'marries' the woman, those junior to him acting as *cicisbeos* and not co-husbands. Levine (this volume) has

⁵Smith distinguishes between two basic types of *cicisbeism* (1953:322). We recognize the validity of this distinction, but it is of minor relevance to our discussion here inasmuch as we are focusing on polyandry and the reason it is differentiated from *cicisbeism*.

evaluated this argument in light of the Nyinba case and found it a problem of interpreting complex data on marital and household organization. She claims that all Nyinba men are married to the common wife, and this is indicated not only by the facts of their relationship, but also by the right and obligation of each husband to legitimize children produced in the marriage. Although this analysis may be applicable to other polyandrous systems, the data on paternity among the Pahari and Irava are too uncertain to support firm conclusions on the subject. The manner in which Toda children are accorded legitimate social status—through the performance of the *pursut pimi* or bow and arrow rite—is well known, but questions have been raised about its meaning (Gough 1959). Any husband may perform the relevant rite, though usually one man suffices. Regardless of the way in which paternity is handled within polyandrous marriage, one can suggest that the potentially equal rights that all men hold in their common wives should stand as adequate proof of plural marriage among the Pahari, Irava, Tibetans and Todas. (The criterion of the disposition of affinal relations cannot be applied where polyandrously married men are brothers.)

In fraternal, as with other types of polyandry, co-husbands may include additional wives in their marriages, producing polygynandrous or conjoint unions. With fraternal polyandry, sororal polygyny may be preferred or permitted, thus potentially leading to marriage of a group of brothers to a group of sisters.

B. Associated Polyandry

The term 'associated' has long been used to refer to the polyandrous system of Ceylon; its use will be extended here to include any system in which polyandry is a situational and optative marital strategy open to men who may or may not be brothers. In contrast to the statistical predominance of marriages with two or more husbands in traditional fraternally polyandrous societies, associated polyandry is considered quite normative ideologically, but may not be especially prevalent. Ceylon is the best documented case of a society of this type, descriptions of Sinhalese polyandry have a long tradition up to and including the decline of polyandry in the present day. The questionable case of the Marquesan Islanders (Linton 1936; Otterbein 1963), the polyandry posited for some South American Indian groups (e.g. Peters and Hunt 1975) and that of certain North American Indians (Park 1937; Steward 1936; Stewart 1937), if actually cases of plural marriage, seem to fall into this pattern.⁶ And Burch's recent reevaluation of the material available on Eskimo marriage indicates that associated polyandry was probably an accepted marriage variant among those people too (1970). However

⁶The Marquesans are reported to have practiced a rather unusual form of polyandrous polygyny, quite unlike that described for other polyandrous systems. The Marquesans also seem to be unique in that the polyandrous coalition could be formed by and around women (Otterbein 1963:158), somewhat like *njem*, the cicisbean system of Birom (Smedley this volume). Unfortunately the data on the traditional system of the Marquesans are too meagre to determine whether their marital system permitted polyandry or polykoity. And the data on certain North American groups are so sketchy that it is hard to determine whether certain groups conformed to the fraternal or associated variety of polyandry. The Shoshoni and Northern Paiute seem most definitely to fit into the latter type.

here, all generalizations will be based on the Sinhalese case, due to the comparatively fuller, carefully analyzed data available on Sinhalese kinship and marriage in general and polyandry in particular.⁷

Associated polyandry is a system of marriage in which a woman may marry two, and rarely more than two, men who need not be brothers. The marriage is not begun as a joint venture (as with fraternal polyandry), rather it begins monogamously and additional husbands are incorporated into the pre-existing union at a later date. Kemper chooses to term these marriages as “skewed serial monogamy”, thus:

an associated marriage...is simply a case of one spouse's acquiring a new mate without sloughing off the first...(this volume)

The equally operative sororal polygyny of associated systems may be described in these terms as well.

Associated polyandry is invariably disparate: one of the husbands holds a preeminent position in the marriage. The first husband is always the primary one and has the greatest authority. [The one possible exception being traditional Eskimo polyandry where the available data seem equivocal (Burch 1970)]. However, in Ceylon at least, all men seem to be regarded as husbands and fathers to children produced in the marriage (see Tambiah 1966:293 *passim*; Kemper this volume). Whereas husbands and wives co-reside and cooperate economically, economic resources are held independently—the separation of economic interests is especially clear where the men are not brothers (Tambiah 1966:286, 310-11). One of the most salient features of this marital system is its extreme flexibility, what has been characterized as its ‘looseness’. The very structure of the system permits and even encourages a considerable latitude of individual choice in Ceylon and possibly in other associated marriage systems as well. Flexibility of marriage may be a key element in the operation of any polyandrous system of marriage, but it appears to be especially striking in associated marriage systems.

C. *Nayar Polyandry*

Nayar polyandry is a unique system which has long attracted the attention of anthropologists, and a number of highly competent studies of the subject have been published. To mention a few of the more recent analyses, there are works by Dumont (1961; 1964), Gough (1952, 1959, 1961), and Mencher (1962, 1965). In view of Fuller's recent synthesis (1976), it is hardly necessary to provide a detailed summary of Nayar polyandry here. However we would like to call attention to some of the more outstanding features of the Nayar system which, by virtue of its uniqueness, fills a niche of its own. Moreover Nayar polyandry has challenged so many anthropological assumptions about the nature of human

⁷This discussion of Sinhalese polyandry deliberately overlooks the problem posed by the illegality of these traditional marriages in modern Sinhalese law.

marital and familial organization that it ought to be discussed in any comparative treatment of polyandry.

According to Fuller, traditional Nayar marriage was constituted of both the *tali*-rite and various *sambandham* unions. The former entitled a woman to engage in the sexual and procreative unions of the latter (1976:105).⁸ The nature of the Nayar system was that just as a woman was involved in marital relationships with a number of men, a man was married to a number of women.

Nayar women and their husbands traditionally did not live together in the same household. Husbands were obliged to present their wives certain gifts at specified times, but their relationship had little significance beyond the sexual liaison and the provision of legitimacy to children produced in the marriage. Since the men resided separately and were not ranked in any way, Nayar co-husbandship cannot be typified by the hierarchy characteristic of associated marriage or the solidarity of fraternal polyandry. Also in contrast with both fraternal and associated systems, the men who visited a single woman could not be brothers, nor could a man have sexual relations with two women of the same household. That is, fraternal polyandry and sororal polygyny were prohibited.

D. Secondary Marriage

The form of polyandry known as secondary marriage has been found and described thus far only in Northern Nigeria and the Northern Cameroons.⁹ Descriptive accounts of this custom have been available for over half a century; and M.G. Smith provided the first thorough analysis just over twenty-five years ago (1952). Since that time Chalifoux (1979), Collard (1979), Muller (1969, 1972, 1973, 1976) and Sangree (1969, 1972, 1974, 1979) have enlarged our understanding of four systems in which secondary marriage is the norm. There seems to be a prevailing resistance to the anthropological acceptance of secondary marriage as a form of polyandry; and this may be due to rather narrow definitional notions reinforced by exotic and/or androcentric biases. The result of this has been to hamper explanations of marriage as practiced on the Jos Plateau of Northern Nigeria and to limit comparative studies of polyandry. We hope that the data and analyses presented in this volume will mitigate such problems.

⁸After this essay had been completed, we received a copy of Fr. Puthenkalam's (1977) informative study of marriage and familial organization among the matrilineal peoples of Kerala. Fr. Puthenkalam considers *tali*-tying to be a prenuptial rite, celebrated with greater ceremony than that accorded to *sambandham*, the true nuptial (1977:35-38). This can be seen as complementing, rather than contradicting, Fuller's analysis of *tali*-tying as a first marriage cum rite of passage for the girl and of *sambandham* as a second marriage which served to give one or more men rights in the women's sexuality and procreative capacities. *Sambandham* is the monogamous civil marriage of the present day (Fuller 1976:VI; Puthenkalam 1977:III).

⁹Collard's recent account (1979) of the traditional marriage system of the Guidars is a clear-cut example of the secondary marriage type of polyandry in the Northern Cameroons. It is very similar in structural form to that of the Irigwe of Nigeria, even though the two tribes are several hundred kilometers apart, and there is no evidence of common Guidars-Irigwe cultural roots or social interaction. Recent monographs on the Mouktele (Juillerat 1971) and the Mada and Mouyeng (Richard 1977) indicate that secondary marriage practices were probably prevalent in these Northern Cameroon Societies as well.

Secondary marriage may be defined as follows:

The marriage of a woman, during the lifetime of her first or primary husband, to one or more secondary husbands which neither necessitates nor implies divorce or annulment of previous or temporarily co-existing marriages (adapted from Smith 1952:312).

Secondary marriage implies sequential marital rites and serial cohabitations, without the severance of prior unions or the cessation of the rights and duties associated with these prior unions. Thus a woman may cohabit with a first husband, marry a second and leave the first without abrogating her right to return to the first and have children by him at a later date. In this way, a series of separate marriages constitutes a set of marriages which are ideologically and jurally effective simultaneously. Although the woman does not live with all her husbands at the same time, she is concurrently wed to all of them and these marriages last for life.

Kemper characterized Sinhalese polyandry as “skewed serial monogamy”, but this term is even more descriptive of African secondary marriages. A major contrast between the Sinhalese and African systems of polyandry is that in the latter, divorce and therefore a return to monogamy is simply not possible. With regard to African polygyny, Clignet provides the following insight:

Africans argue that remarriage subsequent to a divorce is merely another form of polygyny, one less desirable because it imposes on Westerners succession and discontinuity in married life (1970:3).

This observation is certainly illustrative of the general ideology underlying the secondary marriage system.

The outcome of this prohibition on separation and divorce is permanent multiple marriages for men and women, men carried out according to certain rules and correspondingly elaborated into systems which differ in the various societies. The way in which these systems operate is described in detail in a number of contributions to this volume. Here we need not review these details, but will draw attention to certain key features of these secondary marriage systems.

Like other forms of polyandry, secondary marriage necessarily implies a co-existing polygyny. As Chalifoux notes, “Abisi polyandry and polygyny are integrally related; they have the effect of augmenting each other’s functional attributes” (this volume). Due to patterns of postmarital residence and inheritance co-residential polygyny occurs, while co-residential polyandry does not. Consequently polygyny appears to be the significant aspect of this system of plural marriage. However, on a deeper level, neither polygyny nor polyandry is structurally primary. In secondary marriage, at the same time that men pursue their marital careers, wedding a series of wives, women are independently involved in a series of marriages of their own. The outcome of this may be described as polyandry for women and polygyny for men; women have several husbands, men a number of wives. Thus secondary marriage in Africa cannot be typified as

either polyandry *or* polygyny, rather it is a combination of the two as the product of men's and women's separate marital careers. (G. Harris, personal communication). The use of the term 'secondary marriage' derives from M.G. Smith's early paper (1952) and refers to the distinction between a woman's first and later marriages. While we have continued to use it to specify the Northern Nigerian type of polyandry, we also have suggested the term 'polyandrous polygyny', because it is descriptively apt and provides a ready contrast with the shared co-residential 'polygynandry' of the South Asian type.

Secondary marriage or polyandrous polygynous systems are not uniform throughout the Jos Plateau. Rather there are certain differences in the marital systems of each polyandrous polygynous tribe. The differences are not random; they can be seen as variations on a single theme and are described by Muller (this volume) as the outcome of transformations of two pair sets—endogamy vs. exogamy and primary vs. secondary marriage. Here polyandry is never fraternal, polygyny never sororal, and while men are not ranked in these unions, first wives hold a special status in some societies (Muller 1969:1069, 1973:47, Chali-foux this volume).

E. *Cicisbeism*

Finally we would like to add a few notes on cicisbeism, a custom which superficially is the masculine analog of concubinage. Reports of wife-lending and open relationships between women and their lovers are fairly common in the ethnographic literature and seem to be associated with a considerable degree of sexual freedom for women. Cicisbeism, as a system of open and regularized extramarital sexual relationships often involving cohabitation, contrasts with the secrecy of adultery, even where the latter is privately or unofficially tolerated. Cicisbeism seems to serve as a functional alternative to polyandry—since the two are found regularly in neighboring or similar societies. Smith (1953:321-22) has discussed some of the crucial differences between cicisbeism and secondary marriage in Africa; his deduction, however, that they cannot coexist in African patrilineal societies is invalidated by the Malabu case (Meek 1931:100-103; Muller this volume).

In order to clarify the major differences that exist between marriage and cicisbean relationships and to explain why we so sharply distinguish between polyandry as a form of polygamy and cicisbeism it may be useful to assess the latter according to Leach's list of material rights (1955). In evaluating each set of rights in turn we note that: (1) cicisbeism does not suffice to confer legal parentage of children produced in the relationship (Leach's rights A and B); (2) the woman and her cicisbeo lack monopolistic rights in one another's sexuality, domestic or labor services (rights C through F); (3) a cicisbeo does not gain partial or total rights over his lover's property or vice versa (though gift exchange is predictably common), nor is a joint fund of property established for any children (rights G through I); and (4) there is no relationship of affinity established between the cicisbeo and his lover's brothers (right J). Thus, by no established criterion can cicisbeism be considered equivalent to marriage. As we have already

implied, *cicisbeism* is not the exact “counterpart of concubinage” (though perceived as such by Meek 1925: 197); the *cicisbean* relationship depends on the tolerance of the woman’s husband, whereas a wife’s permission is seldom relevant to her husband’s relationship with a concubine. In fact it is necessary for a relationship characterized by amiability to prevail between husband and *cicisbeo*—quite in contrast to secondary marriage, where relationships are characterized by formality and interpersonal restraint.

We developed the preceding fourfold classification of polyandry, with a fifth category for *cicisbeism*, in order to delineate some of the major differences between polyandrous systems found throughout the world. We do not regard this typology as having absolute validity, but we believe it is a useful way of clarifying one’s thinking on the subject and, moreover, that it facilitates comparison of aspects of polyandrous systems on a number of levels. For just one example, a comparison of the various types of polyandry readily reveals the differences in relationships prevailing between co-husbands. In fraternal polyandry the husbands are brothers and a high degree of solidarity prevails. In the more optative associated systems, polyandry is perceived as ideally fraternal, but need not be so in actuality. Here co-husband relationships are amicable, but are underlain by hierarchy. And in the non-fraternal African systems, the co-husband relationship may be characterized as one of thinly-veiled hostility controlled by formal politeness. The range of these relationships—from unity to antagonism—is clearly a consequence of the relative emphasis on kinship between co-husbands.¹⁰

F. *South Asian and Northern Nigerian Polyandry Compared*

The typology which we have developed here also serves to illustrate some of the fundamental contrasts between the essentially centripetal features of South Asian polyandry and the centrifugal consequences of the Northern Nigerian marital variants. Now we shall examine this contrast more fully, preparatory to discussing some of the underlying similarities in all polyandrous systems.

In Northern Nigeria secondary marriage results in an extensive network of ties of kinship and alliance throughout a tribe. The emphasis on such extensive ties, which we have described as alliance proliferative, is reflected in a number of marital practices in these societies, such as the complex rules of group exogamy. It is also consonant with the customary prohibitions on sororal polygyny and fraternal polyandry. The result of these polyandrous polygynous systems is a situation of cross-cutting alliances of political significance which serve to unite tribal sub-groups. The general circumstances and consequences of these marriages are epitomized in the characterization of Northern Nigeria marriage systems as centrifugal in nature. Conversely the marital systems of South Asia, whether fraternal, Nayar, or associated forms of polyandry, serve to concentrate social ties within a smaller group. (Due to the limited data on associated polyandrous systems outside South Asia, it would be impossible to determine whether polyandry

¹⁰Co-wives in polygyny are never as solidary as co-husbands in fraternal polyandry and this may be related to the fact that each woman founds a separate nuclear family whose interests diverge, whereas co-husbands are part of the same nuclear family (see also Kemper this volume).

has equivalent structural or functional correlates there.) Fraternal and associated polyandry strengthen both social and economic ties between co-husbands, whether brothers or not. Furthermore, in South Asia, polyandry inhibits the dispersal of property and prevents the fragmentation of landholdings. We have previously noted the congruence between South Asian polyandry, other marital practices and the strong and enduring ties between affines which are characteristic of the area. These are all aspects of the centripetal nature of South Asian marriage which consolidate rather than diffuse kinship, social and economic ties. The contrast we have illustrated here may be related to additional fundamental differences between Asian and African marital systems as discussed by Goody (1973).

III. Summary and Conclusions : Some General Attributes of Polyandry

We began this chapter with a discussion of the definitional boundaries of polyandry, establishing what can and should be referred to by this term. In so doing, we took note of past definitional problems which we attributed to exotic and androcentric biases. Moreover we suggested that such biases were responsible for both Westerners' belated acceptance of the very existence of polyandry and the neglect of the subject in studies of kinship and marriage. This topic led us into a brief review of the status of women in polyandrous societies, a subject which, quite characteristically, had received no more than passing and adventitious mention previously. We then turned to a discussion of the economic and political concomitants of polyandry, the latter oriented toward an analysis of its effects on patterns of marital alliance. In response to the suggestion that polyandry is not a unitary phenomenon (Berreman this volume), we developed the classification of polyandry and *cicisbeism* presented above. One of the benefits of such a classificatory scheme is that it facilitates comparisons of structural and functional features of the diverse marital systems described. Moreover it reveals aspects of the more fundamental contrast between South Asian and Northern Nigerian polyandry.

As noted above, our intent throughout the second part of the chapter has been to specify the principal differences characteristic of the various polyandrous subtypes. Consequently we have not paid attention to any of the more obvious similarities found in polyandrous systems everywhere, beyond, of course, the fact of plural marriage itself. Now, in the last section of the chapter, we will have an opportunity to discuss some of the basic and possibly universal features of polyandry. The discussion here has benefitted particularly from the pioneering researches and analytic insights of Prince Peter (1963).

A. Polyandry and Polygyny

In all those societies on which we have adequate ethnographic data, polyandry is always found with polygyny. Needless to say, the obverse is not true: the majority of polygynous societies do not countenance polyandry. Furthermore, where polyandry and polygyny exist together they often are integrated systematically, and this results in marital configurations such as the polygynandry of South Asia and what we have described as the polyandrous polygyny of Northern

Nigeria. It appears that cicisbeism is also found together with polygyny, both in South Asia and Northern Nigeria, but if Prince Peter's example of the fisherfolk of Kalymnos is an instance of cicisbeism, then its association with polygyny is not universal. Although polyandry never 'stands alone' as a culturally prescribed marital option, it is not uncommon for it to be ideologically favored, and its advantages to individuals may be so evident as to make it the dominant form of marriage, or preferred over polygyny as in the Sinhalese case.

The fact that polyandry is characteristically found in conjunction with polygyny (and of course with monogamy as well) appears to be significant and is worthy of further consideration. In the case of secondary marriage, the reason for this conjunction is immediately apparent—polyandry entails polygyny, and this also is true of the Nayar system. But the practice of fraternal and associated polyandry does not necessarily entail an accompanying polygyny. Rather it is optional, chosen in response to certain external constraints. Despite these differences, the apparently universal association of polyandry with polygyny can everywhere be attributed to the notable flexibility of polyandrous marital systems, a flexibility which permits a range of marital alternatives. This subject will be discussed in greater detail in the paragraphs directly following and will be relevant to succeeding discussions as well.

B. *Polyandry and Marital Flexibility*

Polyandry everywhere seems to be associated with a high degree of marital flexibility, over and above the obvious range of choice with regard to marital 'types'. In polyandrous groups in South Asia, there is great ease of divorce, remarriage and the reorganization of marital groupings. In fraternal systems, one wife can be divorced and a new wife readily found; second and third wives can join a preexisting polyandrous marriage. Associated systems are even more flexible—husbands too can be added or sloughed off. In the secondary marriage systems of Northern Nigeria the final severance of any particular marriage is impossible, but the customary marital *cum* residential mobility of women produces a constant flux in conjugal combinations. The presence of such notable flexibility in marital decisions does not imply an underlying 'looseness' in the marital system. Individuals in these societies choose to marry as many individuals as they do, at the times that they do, and to end those marriages according to clear-cut economic, demographic or social constraints, and their decisions are guided by well-defined cultural rules. This facet of polyandrous marital systems is obvious in the study of particular groups and becomes even more notable in cross-cultural studies. What is not so apparent is why these systems should be flexible, and why they always include a variety of marital options. Explanations of these factors have been proffered for certain societies, but comparative generalizations are not forthcoming at this time.

C. *The Fragility of Polyandry*

In 1963, after reviewing all the sources then available on the subject, Prince Peter concluded that polyandry was a rare phenomenon, in fact, a "recessive

cultural trait" which is easily destroyed in the course of cultural contact with non-polyandrous peoples (1963:570). Although we now are aware of a greater number of polyandrous societies, it is even more obvious that polyandry is a comparatively rare marital form and one which is fragile in the face of external pressures for social change. Missionaries and proselytizers of various faiths, together with administrators of modern nation-states, have provided sufficient opposition to effect the complete cessation or a decrease in the incidence of polyandrous marriages. Such appears to have been the case among the Nayar, Sinhalese, the Kagoro of Northern Nigeria (for mention of the latter, see Smith 1969) and undoubtedly among the Tibetans as well. As Sangree reports (this volume) polyandry in Irigwe has been recently outlawed, though the government does not instigate proceedings against polyandrous/polygynous individuals. There the older people, those who have already embarked on the round of secondary marriages, persist in their commitment to it, while it appears that younger people are increasingly favoring monogamy. Polyandry is still practiced in the mountain regions of Nepal, northern India and among the Todas, where outside pressures have been relatively weak.

Goldstein suggests that polyandry is readily relinquished because, given a choice, men prefer to wed monogamously. Thus when economic or other factors permit, men will dissolve polyandrous unions to seek wives of their own (1976:232). Although it is quite possible that the men of Limi (on which Goldstein's observations are based) prefer monogamy, we know of no similar claims made for other polyandrous groups. Moreover this hypothesis, just as with Prince Peter's suggestion that polyandry is an expression of latent male homosexual desires (1962:569), simply cannot be substantiated empirically. The development of cross-culturally validated, independent measurements of sexual-partner-number preferences, for Goldstein's hypothesis, and of latent homosexuality, for Prince Peter's, would be first steps to testing these ideas. We will leave this difficult and worthwhile task to others.

Although we cannot suggest any reasons for the intrinsic fragility of polyandry, we would like to offer some suggestions as to why it is relinquished so readily. First of all, polyandry is usually one option in a system of alternative marital forms and is sanctioned by an ideology which encompasses all these marital variants. Thus, if and when polyandry is proscribed, it may be accepted initially as a limitation on only one marital configuration and not as a complete inversion or modification of the traditional marital system. However the prohibition of polyandry may be seen as a more substantial limitation of marital possibilities in some societies than in others. We could postulate that rules forbidding polyandry may have led to considerable social upheaval among such peoples as propertied Tibetans, where it was a central feature of domestic organization. For the Sinhalese system, as presently described, it may have been less problematic. In the Nayar case the cessation of polyandry seems to have been facilitated by Nayar social reformers, thus it was undertaken more or less voluntarily. Nonetheless it did occasion other social changes, as in familial organization and in the status of women (see footnotes 1 and 8).

D. *The Separation of Women's Sexual and Procreative Attributes*

Although not immediately apparent in the literature, it appears to be virtually universal for polyandry to entail a jural separation of a woman's sexual and procreative attributes. The reason for this should be self-evident. Whereas a woman's sexuality can be shared among an unlimited number of men, her childbearing capacities cannot—at least in societies positing a single progenitor for each of the children she bears, as in all the better-known polyandrous groups. Phrased another way, one can say that polyandry implies concurrently shared rights *in uxorem*, but differentially allocated rights *in genetricem* (see Bohannan 1949 on this distinction). In instances of fraternal and associated polyandry all husbands, jurally speaking, have common rights *in uxorem*, but rights *in genetricem* are either allocated to one of the husbands or are bestowed each time the wife becomes pregnant or shortly after she gives birth. In the Nayar case non-exclusive rights *in uxorem* are bestowed serially upon a number of men—the *sambandham* husbands, but rights *in genetricem* are retained forever by the woman's natal family, in effect, by her brothers. In secondary marriage the husbands have sequential and periodic rights *in uxorem* vis-a-vis their common wife, but the decision as to which of the husbands will obtain rights *in genetricem* and thus be designated pater of a particular child is postponed until the woman is pregnant or has given birth.

The pattern of disposal of rights in women seems to be correlated with the strength of the woman's ties to her natal group following upon her marriage. Thus in the typically patrilineal and patrilocal fraternally polyandrous societies, women lose rights in their natal groups when they marry and become totally incorporated in their husbands' homes. It naturally follows that the husbands themselves hold rights *in uxorem* and *in genetricem*, irrespective of how they are allocated within the polyandrous sibling group. The associated polyandrous system of Ceylon is almost identical in this regard, except that women apparently are entitled to regain rights in their natal homes subsequent to their marriages. The matrilineal Nayar never abrogate rights *in genetricem* and retain rights of disposal over sexual access to their women. Among the Irigwe of Northern Nigeria, where inheritance is patrilineal and where women move from husband to husband, the woman's natal group retains the obligation to bestow rights *in uxorem* on each of the husbands, and also the obligation to affirm the bestowal of rights *in genetricem* on a particular man each time the woman gives birth.

Many societies, including our own, have cultural ideologies which support strong jural and moral commitments to treating rights *in uxorem* and rights *in genetricem* as inseparable and unitary. In androcentric cultures such as ours the two rights are held by one man, the husband, and are never discarded or shared so long as the marriage persists. We believe that it is no accident that a marked increase of interest in polyandry should be occurring now—at a time when the women's movement in the West is challenging our deeply-held convictions about women's proper jural status and the nature of women's sexuality.

In this paper we have addressed ourselves to a wide variety of issues relevant

to the study of polyandry. Assuredly we were not able to consider every worthwhile topic—we could not give extended coverage to such concerns as polyandry and demographic factors, nor did we discuss at length the psychological and ideological concomitants of polyandrous marriage. On the other hand, including as many aspects of the subject as we did, almost inevitably precludes the more thorough and exclusive attention that each deserves. We have tried to strike a reasonable balance between depth and breadth and hope that the results have justified our strategy. Thus we have been able to include such issues as: the effects of polyandry on patterns of alliance, the validity of economic explanations of marital practices, problems of women's status and androcentric biases. We have also developed the analysis of structural subtypes of polyandry, summarized some of the contrasts between Asian and African polyandrous systems and drawn attention to features of polyandry which appear to be universal. We hope that these issues and the hypotheses offered here will provide a basis for further analyses and indicate fruitful lines of inquiry for future research.

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